



Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Jackson Region

December 2016 Newsletter



Jackson Game and Fish Wildlife Biologist Aly Courtemanch prepares to draw a blood sample from a recaptured ewe bighorn sheep.

Working for Healthy Bighorns

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is continuing its multi-year research project on bighorn sheep in the Jackson Region. In December, 10 female bighorn sheep that had been captured and collared in December of 2015 were recaptured for disease sampling. A variety of biological samples were collected to test for respiratory pathogens that can cause pneumonia. In addition, researchers from the Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit performed an ultrasound on each animal to measure body fat. This is a three-year study evaluating how body condition is related to pneumonia outbreaks.

The Jackson herd, which typically numbers approximately 500 animals, has experienced two significant die-offs in recent years. In 2002, it was estimated that as many as 50 percent was lost due to a pneumonia outbreak and another estimated 30 percent lost again in 2011. It is estimated that the herd has climbed back to around 400 animals currently. Near Dubois, the Whiskey Basin herd in the Wind River Range has struggled

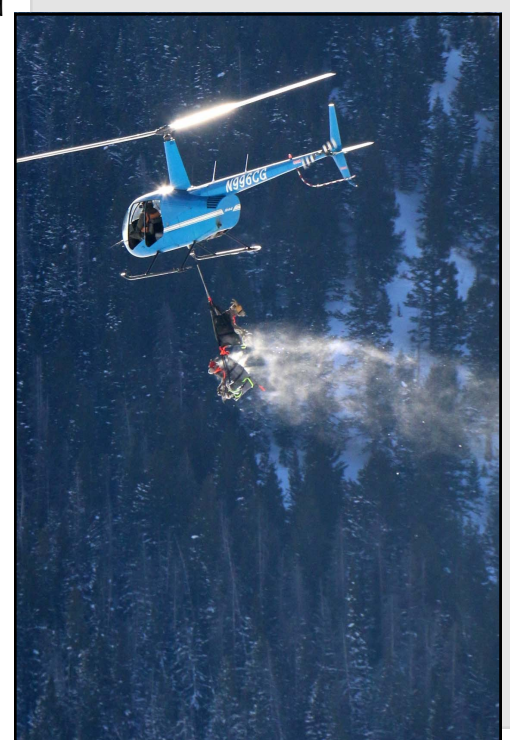
through several pneumonia outbreaks as well. Other bighorn sheep herds across the Rocky Mountains have also experienced significant declines in population due to pneumonia in recent years.



(Above) Wildlife capture crew member Cedar Hincke attaches a pair a bighorn ewes for transport (Below) back their winter range and release.



(Far left) Samantha Dwinell with the Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit attaches a new GPS collar on a ewe while Dr. Kevin Monteith (Left) performs an ultrasound on another recaptured ewe to measure body fat .





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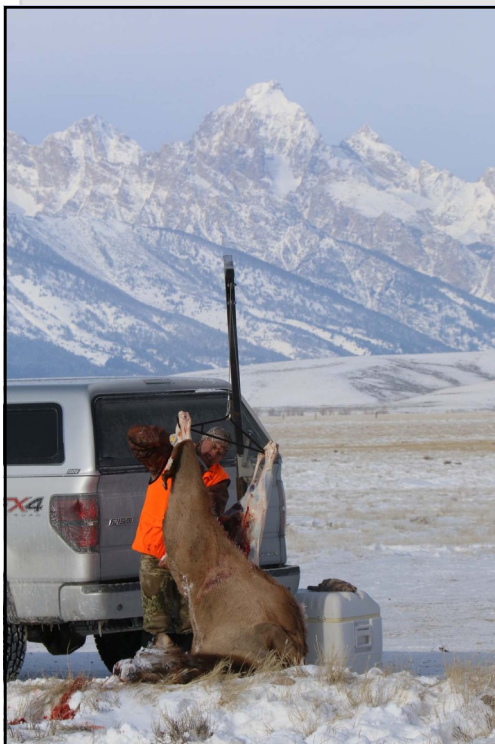
(Left) South Jackson Game Warden Kyle Lash checks a hunter's license in the Curtis Canyon area (Hunt Area 80) east of the National Elk Refuge. (Right) Lash helps a group of successful hunters load their elk on the last day of the season (Nov. 30) in Hunt Area 80.



Elk Hunting Picks Up

Jackson game wardens Kyle Lash and Jon Stephens have been working Jackson's late season elk hunts. After a bit of an early November lull in elk hunting, snowfall returned causing more elk movement and late season harvest picked up considerably. Preliminary reports show the elk harvest in Grand Teton National Park, which ended December 11, was down a bit at around 120.

However, total harvest for the National Elk Refuge, which ends December 16, is well above recent years at over 300. Harvest surveys for those hunt areas on national forest are sent through the mail and results won't be available for a few months. Bison hunting runs through January 10, but harvest has been slow thus far.



(Below left) A successful hunter field dresses a cow elk on the National Elk Refuge. (Below) Jackson warden Kyle Lash helps a hunter lower his pack in Hunt Area 80. (Lower right) Jackson warden Jon Stephens and his dog Gus check a hunter's elk at an interagency check station in Grand Teton NP. (Right) Stephens visits with a hunter as elk gather on the National Elk refuge.





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Wyoming Game and Fish CWD Technician Chris Timberlake collects a retropharyngeal lymph node (Right) for CWD testing from hunter-harvested elk on the National Elk Refuge.

Looking For CWD

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department continues to put considerable effort toward Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) surveillance in the Jackson Region. This year, there are three Game and Fish CWD Technicians collecting samples and they are joined by another technician from the National Elk Refuge. So far, between the CWD technicians and other regional Game and Fish personnel, over 500 elk samples have been collected with an additional 140 samples from mule deer in the region. This is another notable increase in samples collected. Most samples are collected from hunter-harvested animals in the field,



but other samples are collected at big game check stations, meat processors and opportunistically from vehicle collisions and other mortalities. So far, a moose tested positive for CWD near Bedford in 2008 and a mule deer tested positive near Thayne in February, 2016.

CWD Forum Held

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department participated in a public forum on Chronic Wasting Disease held on December 7 at the National Museum of Wildlife Art in Jackson. The forum highlighted current CWD research and management considerations. The goal of the event is to share current science-based information with the general public and all organizations concerned with the long-term health of area elk and deer populations.

Dr. Mary Wood, State Wildlife Veterinarian for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, was one of several speakers. The event was attended by approximately 100 members of the public. The entire conference was videotaped and [the presentations can be viewed here](#).





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Swan Song

Migrating waterfowl moved into the Jackson area later this fall compared to most years, likely staying north enjoying mild fall conditions. By mid-November, trumpeter swans, both Canadian migrants and Wyoming local resident swans, staged in large numbers on the main Flat Creek marsh at the National Elk Refuge. Every fall, hundreds of swans congregate on the refuge for 2-3 weeks prior to freeze up. Then, except for 30-40 that remain on the refuge, the rest move to other parts of the valley with open water to winter.



A lot of interaction takes place during this few weeks and swans can be heard vocalizing late into the night. It is likely a time when older sibling groups reconnect with adults and when subadults seek out potential mates. Jack-



son nongame Biologist Susan Patla conducted a survey on November 22 from the top of the East Gros Ventre Butte above Jackson to get a count and assess ice conditions on the marsh. Still water areas and about 1/3 of the creek channel were frozen by then. She tallied 139 adults and 42 cygnets for a total of 181 swans on the National Elk Refuge. Cygnets or young of the year made up 23% of the swans observed which indicates a high productivity year for swans. Susan heard a few high pitched tundra swans calling at night later in the month contrasting to the more numerous and deeper-throated trumpeters.

Lion Sighting

North Jackson Game Warden Jon Stephens received a call of a lion that had been seen on multiple occasions near homes on West Gros Ventre Butte in early November. Upon arrival, Stephens was able to capture this photo with his phone of the mother lion with two kittens crossing the road in front of him. Further investigation revealed an elk carcass the lion family had been feeding on in some shrubbery next to the road. The lion family soon moved on and hasn't been seen since.





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Retrieving the Data

Regional wildlife personnel retrieved several radio-collars from animals that had died over the summer or fall. Collar retrievals are always an adventure as personnel often have to travel into remote areas they wouldn't otherwise go. Jackson Wildlife Biologist Aly Courtemanch and South Jackson Game Warden Kyle Lash took a trip past Beula Lake into southwest Yellowstone National Park to find a mule deer collar for the Wyoming Migration Initiative (Right). The mule deer doe had been collared on winter range near Cody, migrated to her summer range north of Jackson Lake, and then died in October.



Aly Courtemanch also retrieved a bighorn sheep VHF collar near Table Mountain (Left). Both of these animals had been dead for several months before their collars were retrieved, so the causes of death were unknown. Newer technology in the form of GPS satellite collars enables personnel to track animals more closely and investigate mortalities within hours or days. Although more expensive, we are now using these types of collars on several species in the Jackson Region, including bighorn sheep and elk, which will help us better determine causes of death.

Elk X-ing

Many big game animals have been headed for traditional, lower elevation wintering areas, which often has animals crossing roadways. On this day in early December, North Jackson Game Warden Jon Stephens (right) worked with the Wyoming Highway Patrol to stop traffic on Highway 89 just north of Jackson long enough to get a large group of elk pass. Some crossed into the National Elk Refuge and others ran back up onto East Gros Ventre Butte.





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